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SPECIAL COMMITTEE AGAINST APARTHEID

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 665th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 1 April 1993, at 4 p.m.

Chairman: Mrs. DES ILES (Trinidad and Tobago)

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The meeting was called to order at 4.10 p.m.

POSTHUMOUS TRIBUTE TO LOUIS M'BARICK FALL (BATTLING SIKI)

1. The CHAIRMAN said that the current meeting, organized in cooperation with the Permanent Mission of Senegal to the United Nations and the World Boxing Council, was a posthumous tribute to Louis M'barick Fall (Battling Siki), first African world boxing champion, who by his valour and skill, had helped to break down racial barriers.

2. Born in Saint Louis, Senegal in 1897, Battling Siki won the world light-heavyweight title on 24 September 1922. Early in his life, Siki was forced to confront racism. In 1915, during the First World War, he was assigned to a French-army regiment composed only of African soldiers. Later, at the height of his boxing career, he had the chance to fight for the world title so long as he allowed his white opponent to win. Battling Siki used the opportunity to defend his principles and, ignoring the condition imposed on him, won the contest. That act of courage opened the door for countless boxers and athletes of African descent to triumph after him.

3. The posthumous tribute to Battling Siki was also a tribute to all the dedicated and courageous people who had struggled to wipe out racial discrimination. The contribution of the World Boxing Council to the elimination of apartheid in sports deserved special recognition.

4. Mr. JONAH (Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs), speaking on behalf of the Secretary-General, said that he felt highly honoured at the opportunity to pay tribute to the great African champion and expressed the hope that racial discrimination in boxing and other sports would soon become a thing of the past in South Africa, so that all black South African athletes might participate in international contests as representatives of a new, non-racist and democratic South Africa.

5. The World Boxing Council was helping to build two gymnasiums in South Africa, one in Soweto and another in East London. That generous act was to be commended. Other sports organizations should be urged to help South African athletes, particularly those from the most underprivileged classes of society.

6. Mr. DEGUENE KA (Ambassador of Senegal to the United States) read out a message to the President of the World Boxing Council from Mr. Abdou Diouf, Head of State of Senegal, paying posthumous tribute to Battling Siki, a symbol of valour, justice and equality and expressing appreciation to the President of the World Boxing Council for the tireless struggle he had waged to have the great champion's mortal remains repatriated.

7. Although some of the persons present were not born when Siki had fought in the French army and had triumphed in the boxing rings of Europe and the United States or when he had fallen victim in New York to an enemy's bullets, his name evoked the legendary life of a champion for everyone. At the eulogy delivered at Battling Siki's funeral service, the Reverend Adam Clayton Powell had declared that Siki was not a man of the past but rather the personification of the future.

8. Mr. MAYCOCK (Chairman of the Commission against Apartheid in Sports) referred to the close relationship which existed between the Special Committee against Apartheid and the Commission against Apartheid in Sports and said he was pleased that the contribution of Africa to mankind's development was increasingly acknowledged. A product of the diaspora himself, he felt proud whenever a son of Africa excelled in any discipline. Battling Siki had succeeded in becoming a champion. His life, his victories and even his ill-fated death were an undeniable contribution to the progress made thus far in the elimination of racial discrimination.

9. The International Convention against Apartheid in Sports had made consolidation of that progress its objective. The terms of the Convention would cease to have effect once the system of apartheid had been completely dismantled. But the principles which the Convention enshrined would continue to guide Governments, sports organizations and athletes.

10. Tribute was due to another boxing champion, the great Mohammed Ali, who was present at the meeting and whose great contribution to sports would always be remembered, and also to José Sulaiman Chagnon, President of the World Boxing Council, for his invaluable cooperation with the Committee.

11. The CHAIRMAN said that, in accordance with an understanding reached before the meeting, the boxing champions present in the room had agreed that Mr. Terry Norris and Mr. Julio César Chávez should take the floor on behalf of all boxers in the world.

12. Mr. NORRIS (Super welterweight division champion) and Mr. CHAVEZ (Super lightweight division champion), after paying posthumous tribute to Battling Siki, said that his legacy must be the courage to struggle against racial discrimination. They also praised the work of the United Nations and the World Boxing Council in the struggle to ensure the equality of all men without consideration of race.

13. Mr. SY (Executive Secretary of the Organization of African Unity), alluding to the circumstances which had surrounded the life of Battling Siki, symbol of the pain and glory of the sons of Africa over the last three centuries, recalled that, from his earliest youth, Siki had been forced to confront a harsh world and to blaze a train in sports, the only discipline not closed to dominated peoples. Racism had intervened in his career and had almost succeeded in robbing him of the championship title. Only overwhelming public reaction had allowed the greatest sports scandal ever to be avoided.

14. Battling Siki symbolized, lastly, the odyssey of African immigrants. His tragic demise in New York represented a particularly dramatic episode of the struggle of migrant workers to obtain their rights. His fight had not been in vain. New generations had taken up the banner of the struggle for equality. Peoples living under colonial domination had shaken off the colonial yoke. Discrimination in sports was much less frequent now, and migrant worker rights were more widely acknowledged.

15. Mr. SULAIMAN CHAGNON (President of the World Boxing Council) said that, unfortunately, many people did not know what apartheid was because, like himself, they had been born in countries where racial discrimination, the most loathsome human policy of all, was unknown.

16. While paying posthumous tribute to Battling Siki, he recalled that the white society of his time had not accepted what the boxer had done. He had been slandered and attacked. He had had to cross the Atlantic and come to the United States of America, where murder would end his life one night in 1925.

17. The essence of the World Boxing Council was equality among men. The Council took pride in having in its midst a representative of the black race who was one of the most highly recognized people in the world. That person was the greatest boxer and ambassador for life of the Council - Mohammed Ali. Many were the boxers following in his footsteps.

18. The World Boxing Council considered that the United Nations had a road to travel - the road of equality of all men. For that reason, it had passionately devoted its greatest efforts to the destruction of inhuman racial discrimination. In 1993, the Council had again admitted South Africa after a seventeen-year period of expulsion. It had reason to hope that discrimination in South Africa had come to an end.

19. The unity symbolized by the United Nations, an organization respected throughout the world because it embraced people of all races, religions and nations, would be represented by all boxing champions, because in boxing no inequalities were to be found. Discrimination did not exist in the boxing ring, only two young and valiant boxers, two human beings seeking to show who was better.

20. He pledged not to abandon the passionate struggle to ensure that the World Boxing Council continued to defend equality in the world through peaceful means, with mutual respect and without hatred, and despite the fact that boxing was a violent sport. The plaques of appreciation he was awarding were from the World Boxing Council to the Secretary-General through his representative at the meeting, to Mr. Mohammed Ali, to Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid, to Mrs. Annette des Iles in the International Women's Year, to Mr. Ahmed Araim and to Mr. Ernest Besley Maycock.

21. The CHAIRMAN said that the current meeting, even if only symbolically, was a reaffirmation of the conviction that all human beings were born equal despite the differences among races and that everyone deserved the same right to dignity and freedom. In the world today, where explosions of racism and hatred were on the increase, one must learn from the lessons of the past and display the courage, as did Battling Siki, to say "no" to racism loudly and clearly.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.